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The Palimpsest

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH
Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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At the End of Their Rope

A part of the public park system of the city of Council Bluffs embraces the remainder of what in early days was called "Big Lake", a body of water which, in 1853, was in the neighborhood of a mile and one-half long and from one-half to three-fourths of a mile wide. It was in fact the old bed of the Missouri River abandoned by the stream about the year 1832, when what was known to river men as "Hart's Cutoff" was formed nearly a mile to the westward. Between the new channel and the abandoned river bed was left a strip of land locally known as "the island", covered by a dense growth of cottonwood, willow, and other trees, underbrush, and wild grape vines, making an ideal habitat for wild turkeys, rabbits, and quail. A few bobcats and lynxes also dwelt therein, while coons, skunks, wolves, foxes, and other animals common to the locality abounded, making the tract a favorite hunt-

ing ground for the nimrods of the then small city and vicinity.

One Saturday morning, after a moderate snow fall late in the autumn of 1860, two well-grown school boys left the City Hotel to spend a holiday hunting on the island and in the vicinity of the lake. Late in the afternoon, having traversed the island and rounded the northern end of the lake, they began their homeward journey, hunting through the rough hills bordering the eastern side of the lake, and near the close of the day entered a broad ravine thickly wooded with small burr oak and other trees. About half way through this ravine, and only little more than a mile from home, they came upon a number of horses tethered to the branches of the trees, the indications being that they had been there for several days and had been well cared for. Boys to the manner born, they instantly recognized the fact that they had come upon a horse thief's hiding place. They were sufficiently discreet to know that, although no human being was to be seen, it would be well not to seem too curious, so apparently without paying great attention to the horses, they hastened to the hotel and informed the landlord of their discovery. He immediately communicated the information to the city marshal, who was also a deputy sheriff.

It was too late to do anything about the matter that night, but the marshal summoned a posse of three citizens good and true and made preparation

for a very early move the following morning. Accordingly at break of day the deputy and his posse, with one of the boys for a guide, started for the thieves' rendezvous. Upon arrival there they found that the quarry had fled during the night with all the booty. The trail led out to the lake and along its eastern and southern shore to the south end of the island where it entered the shallow water lying between the river bank and a sand bar some three hundred yards distant, thence across the bar and into the rapid channel. Through the deep water the thieves had evidently swum the horses to the Nebraska shore. This dangerous course was adopted by them to avoid the town of Omaha on the south and Florence at the north.

From this point the boy guide returned to his home, while the deputy and posse went down to the ferry between Omaha and Council Bluffs, crossed the river, and soon afterward picked up the trail of the thieves which led westward over the first line of hills and then turned to the north. Obviously the scoundrels were heading for the Indian country near Blackbird Hills at which place the Omaha Indian agency was then located. After passing far enough north to avoid the town of Florence the trail returned to the river bank just above the village of Fort Calhoun, and about two miles farther on it terminated. The thieves had gone into camp, prepared and eaten breakfast, rolled up in their blankets, and gone to sleep. It was in this condition that

they were discovered by the deputy and his posse. They were awakened and disarmed, and with the recovered horses the deputy and posse soon afterward began the return journey to Council Bluffs, where they arrived early in the evening.

While the horses were being put away at the livery stable some one asked the deputy if he had brought in the thieves. He replied laconically, "No, we didn't bring 'em in, but we know where they are."

A few days later a hunter arriving at the village of Fort Calhoun reported having seen the bodies of three men hanging in a tree a mile or two above town. Investigation proved his report to be true. The coroner attended to the obsequies without inquiring too closely as to why, when, or by whom the men had been hanged, and thus the episode, not an unusual one for the time, was closed.

The stolen horses were all eventually restored to their owners, who were residents of southern Iowa and northern Missouri. And the boy who helped trail the thieves never forgot that thrilling experience.

CHARLES H. BABBITT

Grant's Des Moines Speech

Even an old soldier in the city of Des Moines on Wednesday, September 29, 1875, would have been deeply impressed with the profusion of floral decorations and the universal display of patriotic colors. Spanning Fourth Street from the Aborn House to the Allen Block was a triumphal arch, on one side of which in mammoth letters were the words "Welcome to Des Moines", while on the other side, as a fitting thought for the departing guest, was the stirring sentiment, "The Union Forever". The visitor who made his way through the jostling crowd along Fourth Street to the Savery House, where two of the largest flags ever brought to Des Moines were floating in the autumnal breeze, would have noticed another arch inscribed with the legends, "Army of the Tennessee" and "Let us have Peace". Patriotic selections played by two military bands thrilled the crowds of Civil War veterans who thronged the streets.

The occasion for this display of patriotism in the capital city of Iowa was the annual reunion of the Society of the Army of the Tennessee. Conspicuous among the members of the organization were some of the most able military leaders in the world. President Ulysses S. Grant, the most illustrious American soldier of the century, whose name and

fame were cherished with those of Washington and Lincoln, honored the reunion with his quiet and unostentatious presence. General William T. Sherman, loved by every boy in blue and admired the world over for his military genius, was president of the Society. The Secretary of War, W. W. Belknap, one of the most eminent commanders of Iowa troops, was also in attendance.

The President and his party arrived on the Des Moines Valley Railroad about half past three in the morning of September 29th, and remained in their special cars until seven. Between six and seven a special salute of twenty-one guns was fired for the President, and two salutes of thirteen guns each for Secretary Belknap and General Sherman. The formal program of the reunion began with a business session of the Society at eleven o'clock in the Opera House.

In the evening there was music by the St. Louis Arsenal Band and Drum Corps, a number of addresses, and an elaborate banquet at the Savery which was reported to have been unquestionably "the finest feast ever spread in Iowa." The address of welcome by Judge C. C. Cole was greeted with hearty applause. Then General Sherman introduced Thomas C. Fletcher, formerly the Governor of Missouri, as orator of the occasion. He spoke at some length concerning Iowa in the Civil War and paid a high tribute to the service of the private soldier. At the close of his address there were loud cries for

Grant, nor would his erstwhile comrades in arms be quiet until the President came to the footlights and spoke ingenuously of the war, of problems confronting the nation, and of his own ideals.

"Comrades: — It always affords me much gratification to meet my old comrades in arms of ten to fourteen years ago, and to live over again the trials and hardships of those days, hardships imposed for the preservation and perpetuation of our free institutions. We believed then, and believe now, that we had a government worth fighting for, and if need be, dying for. How many of our comrades of those days paid the latter price for our preserved Union! Let their heroism and sacrifices be ever green in our memory. Let not the results of their sacrifices be destroyed. The Union and the free institutions for which they fell should be held more dear for these sacrifices.

"We will not deny to any of those who fought against us any privileges under the government which we claim for ourselves. On the contrary we welcome all such of them who come forward in good faith to help build up the waste places and perpetuate our institutions against all enemies as brothers in full interest with us in a common heritage. But we are not prepared to apologize for the part we took in the great struggle. It is to be hoped that like trials will never befall our country. In this sentiment no class of people can more heartily join than the soldier who submitted to the dangers, trials

and hardships of the camp and the battle-field, on which ever side he may have fought. No class of people are more interested in guarding against a recurrence of those days. Let us then begin by guarding against every enemy threatening the perpetuity of free republican institutions.

"I do not bring into this assemblage politics, certainly not partizan politics, but it is a fair subject for the deliberation of soldiers to consider what may be necessary to secure the prize for which they battled. In a republic like ours, where the citizen is the sovereign and the official the servant, where no power is exercised except by the will of the people, it is important that the sovereign — the people — should possess intelligence. The free school is the promoter of that intelligence which is to preserve us as one Nation. If we are to have another contest in the near future of our national existence I predict that the dividing line will not be Mason and Dixon's, but between patriotism and intelligence on the one side, and superstition, ambition and ignorance on the other. Now in this centennial year of our national existence, I believe it a good time to begin the work of strengthening the foundation of the house commenced by our patriotic forefathers one hundred years ago at Concord and Lexington. Let us all labor to add all needful guarantees for the more perfect security of Free Thought, Free Speech, a Free Press, Pure Morals, unfettered Religious Sentiment, and of Equal Rights and Privileges to all

men irrespective of Nationality, Color or Religion. Encourage free schools and resolve that not one dollar of money appropriated to their support, no matter how raised, shall be appropriated to the support of any sectarian school. Resolve that either the state or Nation, or both combined, shall support institutions of learning sufficient to afford to every child growing up in the land the opportunity of a good common school education, unmixed with sectarian, pagan or atheistical tenets. Leave the matter of religion to the family circle, the church and the private school supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the church and state forever separate. With these safeguards I believe the battles which created us 'the Army of the Tennessee' will not have been fought in vain.''

President Grant has always been known as a man of action and few words. His Des Moines address, brief though it was, represented an unusual oratorical effort, if indeed it was not the best speech of his entire public career. Although the speech itself was remarkable, its subsequent history was even more surprising.

While it might be assumed that any public address by the President would receive widespread attention, Grant's Des Moines speech would scarcely be considered sensational. Nevertheless, as reported and commented upon in the newspapers, it stirred up a tempestuous controversy. Since an exact copy of the speech as delivered was not available, the

early reports were neither uniform nor accurate, while the editorials based upon flagrant misquotation were at cross-purposes. One of the New York papers said that the speech was "so bungling in its construction that it must have been Grant's own," and that "it would never have been made if he had not escaped from his keepers and from all good political advisers."

The Philadelphia *Times* praised the address for its literary construction but condemned it as a third-term campaign speech. "President Grant has broken his silence," wrote the editor, "made a platform of his own, and flung his third-term banner to the breeze in defiance of all party organizations. Just who is the author of his remarkable speech delivered before the Army of the Tennessee, in which he defines his new political campaign, is of little consequence. It has been elaborately prepared, and has the merit of polished culture and studied expression, such as the politician would employ. It is, in fact, a distinct political departure, making the bid of desperation for a continuance of power." Democratic papers in Boston agreed with this view and thought the speech had been "deliberately and craftily planned".

The New York *Tribune* commented upon the fact that President Grant broke his usual custom and read a speech of some length in answer to a call from the audience. The only feature of the address to which any political significance could attach, the

writer thought, was the pointed reference to the subject of common schools and the necessity of keeping church and state forever separate. The *Tribune* concurred in the opinion of the President, but thought it a "mystery" that he should have introduced the subject in so formal a manner and upon such an occasion. The editor asserted that education was not a political issue, while the subjects of finance, currency, and administrative reform were vital questions, "and an earnest word or two on these, particularly on the currency" would have been much more appropriate. "As it is, men can only wonder why he passed over the questions on which the parties have joined battle, and in which everybody feels a vital interest", to talk upon one which was not a national political issue. In conclusion the speech was characterized as only "a contribution to the curiosities of official literature".

Amid this confusion of editorial comment, the *Iowa State Register* explained that the speech had been written hurriedly just before supper on the evening when it was delivered. During the afternoon while riding about the city a man in the President's carriage had mentioned the functions of the public schools in the course of the conversation immediately after the problem of reconstruction had been discussed. The President spoke freely on both subjects, whereupon his companion expressed the wish that he would sometime soon make his views public. Grant replied that if he had time he

would prepare a few remarks upon those two questions, as he would probably be called upon to speak at the reunion meeting in the evening. The ride was shortened for that purpose, and the President hastily jotted down the short speech.

Viewed in this light the subject-matter of the address became perfectly explicable: it was but the logical development of thoughts which were uppermost in the President's mind. The occasion was not suitable for a political address. Nor did the President wish to surrender dignity and courtesy for the sake of political preferment. The trials and hardships of war were still vivid in the memory of the veterans, yet they were eager to hear of the pursuits of peace. Far from being illogical or inopportune, the speech was the result of a happy combination of circumstances. In all sincerity President Grant discussed education as a factor in the preservation of peace and free government. The speech was entirely logical and the exigencies of the occasion sufficiently explain its origin.

The main controversy over the address centered not upon its source, however, but upon the content. The principal theme of the speech was a plea for the preservation of republican government through the encouragement and development of free public schools. To this end the President advocated liberal use of money for education both by the States and the nation, but opposed the use of such funds for the support of sectarian schools. His thought was ex-

pressed in the words: "Resolve that either the state or Nation, or both combined, shall support institutions of learning sufficient to afford to every child growing up in the land the opportunity of a good common school education, unmixed with sectarian, pagan or atheistical tenets."

As published in the *Iowa State Register,* this sentence was misquoted by the insertion of three words and two additional letters so that it read: "Resolve that *n*either the State or Nation, *n*or both combined, shall support institutions of learning *other than those* sufficient to afford to every child growing up in the land the opportunity of a good common school education, unmixed with sectarian, pagan or atheistical tenets."

Thus the President was reported to have said the opposite of what he actually thought, making it appear that he favored State maintenance of common schools only and was directly opposed to public support of higher education especially in sectarian colleges. In this form the speech was copied by metropolitan papers throughout the country and discussed in Europe. Professor L. F. Parker of the State University of Iowa declared that the erroneous statement rang "through the civilized world like the thunders of Jove, evoked repeated comments of the ablest pens, agitated the minds of the most sagacious statesmen and disturbed the thought of crowned and mitered heads."

Some newspapers, like the Vinton *Eagle,* con-

tained a correct copy of the address, but other journals that did not have their own reporters in Des Moines relied upon the *Iowa State Register* for the complete text. In that way the false version obtained currency. The published proceedings of the Society of the Army of the Tennessee contained an exact copy of the President's speech, printed from the manuscript, but that was not available at the time of the controversy.

In 1875 there was a noticeable wave of opposition to higher education at public expense. Much to the embarrassment of President George Thacher and others interested in the welfare of the State University of Iowa, President Grant's speech seemed to be in direct opposition to additional appropriations by the State legislature. Educators who were interested in private or denominational schools, however, were elated over the apparent "turning of the tide" against State colleges. President George F. Magoun of Iowa College, in an article published within a month after the Des Moines speech, hastened to take advantage of the President's alleged position in favor of unloading from public education "the upper tiers of institutions which have been piled upon it of late years" in order to "save common schools from Catholic assaults."

Meanwhile Professor Parker, who had become interested in the educational dispute, believed that the excerpts from the President's speech did not correctly represent his views — that something had

been added which the President did not intend. Accordingly he analyzed the speech, pointing out the inconsistencies of the address as published and calling attention to the fact that the sentence which was being so widely commented upon was not in accord with the rest of the address. In a paper read before the Iowa State Teachers' Association in December, 1875, he asserted that, "Only a single sentence in all the speech can by *any possibility* be tortured into opposition to all education by the State, except that in common schools, and that one is sandwiched into an argument against sectarian education, and made a part of it. It was this sectarian education, and this only, as we believe, at which he aimed all his blows." Moreover, Professor Parker argued that irrespective of the speech being hastily fashioned in Des Moines or the probability that words were inserted which altered the meaning of the speaker, still the speech as a whole did not sustain the extreme and positive declarations against State support of higher education which were attributed to it.

The presentation of these facts by Professor Parker convinced those most interested in public education that the President had been misrepresented or that he misrepresented himself — a point which President Grant alone could settle. Accordingly, Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood sent the Magoun article to the President, in which he was made to appear hostile to "the upper tiers of institutions" supported by the State, and asked him to repeat

what he had said or what he designed to express.

In response to this request the President replied: "What I said at Des Moines was hastily noted down in pencil and may have expressed my views imperfectly. I have not the manuscript before me as I gave it to the Secretary of the society. My idea of what I said is this: 'Resolve that the State or Nation or both combined shall furnish to every child growing up in the land, the means of acquiring a good common school education.' Such is my idea and such I intended to have said. I feel no hostility to free education going as high as the State or National Government feels able to provide — protecting, however, every child in the privilege of a common school education before public means are appropriated to a higher education for the few."

Such an explicit statement of intention, of memory, and of opinion gave complete satisfaction to every one in favor of public schools, while the more reluctant were forced to believe that an error had been made in the first printed copies of the speech. As conclusive evidence a photograph of Grant's manuscript was obtained. A second photograph, taken by T. W. Townsend of Iowa City, was vouched for by the President himself as "the photo of the original Des Moines speech."

The chain of evidence was complete. The perverted sentence which had made President Grant appear to attack the cause of higher education, the sentence which had "evoked repeated comments of

the ablest pens", and which had "agitated the minds of the most sagacious statesmen" was at length made clear. Nevertheless, the misquotation persisted and found its way into some of the biographies of the soldier President. Grant's Des Moines speech is famous for what he did not say.

J. A. SWISHER

Comment by the Editor

A MAN OF CHARACTER

U. S. Grant is one of the enigmas of American history: his career is stranger than Lincoln's. A failure at middle life in the eyes of the world — even in his own world of unkempt Western towns — he suddenly flashed across the zenith of public attention, the greatest general of his time. Silent, unostentatious, innocent of artifice, and undisturbed by ambitious dreams, he accepted opportunity as a duty with calm assurance of his own mastery. General Sherman said that he was "as brave, patriotic, and just as the great prototype Washington, as unselfish, kind-hearted, and honest as a man should be"; but his chief characteristic, thought Sherman, was his "simple faith in success". Yet the very qualities which contributed to his greatness — confidence in himself, straightforwardness, magnanimity, and trust in the honor of men — likewise led to the tragedies of his life.

Character was Grant's endowment. Combined with absolute personal integrity was an inveterate guilelessness that repeated betrayal of trust failed to cure. It was said of him that he believed everybody to be as honest as himself. As a boy of eight he wanted a colt owned by a neighbor who asked

twenty-five dollars for it. His father thought the horse was worth only twenty dollars and sent the boy to offer that price. "If it was not accepted," wrote Grant in his memoirs, "I was to offer twenty-two and a half, and if that would not get him, to give the twenty-five. I at once mounted a horse and went for the colt. When I got to Mr. Ralston's house, I said to him: Papa says I may offer you twenty dollars for the colt, but if you won't take that, I am to offer twenty-two and a half, and if you won't take that, to give you twenty-five." The incident was an omen. Change the figure of farmer Ralston profiting by the boy's artlessness to O. E. Babcock of the whisky ring, to Jay Gould of Black Friday fame, or to Ferdinand Ward, the final profiteer from Grant's credulity, and the horse story becomes prophetic.

Aside from his magnanimous honesty, no feature of Grant's character is more prominent than his reticence. He never made a speech if he could avoid it. When he took command of the Twenty-first Illinois Infantry he was introduced to the regiment by two very eloquent orators. The only response of the new colonel was the laconic order, "Men, go to your quarters." Later in the war, a committee from Congress came to Vicksburg to present a gold medal to the victorious leader of the armies of the West. When the last speaker had concluded his peroration there was an expectant pause. All were waiting for Grant to speak, but he remained silent. The situation became so tense that young Jesse

Grant could not bear it. "Papa, aren't you going to make a speech too?" he cried. "No, my dear boy!" answered his father with such vehemence that every one heard, and a wave of laughter ended the general embarrassment.

When occasion demanded Grant spoke concisely and with the utmost frankness. Neither of his inaugural addresses contained more than fourteen hundred words, while his Des Moines speech of approximately seven hundred words was one of the most extended impromptu addresses he ever made. But if his remarks were brief they had a ring of candor and sincerity. The terse sentences of his first inaugural are almost axiomatic. "I shall on all subjects have a policy to recommend, but none to enforce against the will of the people. Laws are to govern all alike — those opposed as well as those who favor them. I know no method to secure the repeal of bad or obnoxious laws so effective as their stringent execution." Despite the clamor of contemporary detractors, his speeches will be searched in vain for subtle dissimulation. He stated his ideas so simply and withal so fearlessly that people unaccustomed to truthfulness in politics mistook his veracity for shrewd design. His Des Moines speech in behalf of public schools was hailed as a clever bid for a third term as President! He was as incapable of hypocrisy as of treason.

J. E. B.

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[NOTE — The names of contributors of articles in THE PALIMPSEST are printed in SMALL CAPITALS. The titles of articles and of all other publications are printed in *italics.*]

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JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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